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ABSTRACT

Poetry is an important ingredient in the elementary school curriculum both for its intrinsic qualities and as a vehicle for other subject matter. Rhythm, rhyme, word choice and relationships are best seen and felt by children listening to poetry and, in later elementary school, reading poetry themselves. Children can be motivated to write too, enhancing the technical and emotional aspects of published poetry as well as occasionally serving an individual therapeutic need. The creative teacher can devise jingles and poem games to reinforce learning in subject areas, particularly language arts. Syllabication becomes a game instead of a drill when students write Haiku and Tanka. Vocabulary development is immediately meaningful as students write cinquains or descriptive couplets. Samples of children's work and suggestions for motivation and working methods are included. (TO)

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Poetry in the Elementary School

"There is no frigate like a book

(Bartlett p. 585)

Emily Dickinson

This paper will attempt to answer briefly the following questions:

1. What is poetry?

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2. Why is it an important ingredient in the elementary curriculum?
3. What prosodical forms are easily introduced in the elementary school?
4. How can we motivate children to be creative poets?

What is Poetry?

Poetry has never been defined. However, several writers have suggested some of its basic qualities. Walter Pater states, "Let us understand by poetry all literary production which attains the power of giving pleasure by its form, as distinct from its matter."[2] (Bartlett p. 645)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge in defining prose and poetry says, "prose-words in their best order; poetry,-the best words in their best order." (Bartlett, p. 319.)

Bob Nemec, a sixth grade purpils says:

Poetry
It's rhyme;
It's pleasant:
It's beautiful.
It's in sentences
With no periods.
Sometimes picture poetry.
It's in moods sometimes;
With titles most of the time;
It's with rhythm.

Toussaint suggests that "poetry is the wings of song; the voice of love; the cry of wrong, a vent for all emotions strong; and aliment that feeds a throng." We all know how powerful a poem can be. It has saved a ship, immortalized a rider; galvanized a nation; and has brought courage and strength to the needy.

Edward Blishen, however, tells us "poetry is not always serious or mysterious, nor does it always stir in us grave emotions. Poetry ...can laugh, chuckle, make jokes. The subject of poetry, in fact, may be anything, whatever can be expresses by human beings with a sense of words and of rhythm, a sharp eye, a keen ear, an inquiring mind, and an open heart."[3] (Blishen p. 8)

Poetry in the Curriculum

Long before a child enters school, he should be introduced to poetry. Mother Goose Rhymes are probably the best as they have brought joy to millions of children over the years. But no parent should stop with these. Children can find pleasure from listening to other poems that are within their sphere of experience or to ones created especially for them. It's great fun to make-up personal jingles such as "I love my little Eddie; I love my little lamb, who sits up in his high chair and eats his bread and jam." or "Our turtle's name is Pokie; we love her very much. She wandered in our house one day, and hid behind the hutch." (Toussaint)

Every primary teacher should plan to read a varied of poems to children, poems about familiar things; animals, action, adventure, poems that invokes laughter and joy. Since poets are the masters of language, children should have great exposure to their creative art. Listening to poetry can help the child improve his vocabulary,

his ability to listen and respond, and hopefully provide him with opportunities to share his appreciation with others. But most of all, it can open the door of creativity for him.

Many of the publishing firms are recognizing the importance of poetry in the curriculum and are building it into their reading and language arts programs.

Jingles, one form of rhyme, can be most useful in correcting errors in grammar. One fourth grade was having difficulty using "I haven't any." for "I ain't got." The teacher had them create verses using the correct phrase; made copies for each pupil, then used them as an oral reading lesson. Here are a few samples:

I haven't any pencils; I haven't any books; because my desk was ramsacked by a naughty crook.

I haven't any cousins: I haven't any aunts; if I didn't have a gramdma, I'd surely rave and rant.

A similar procedure was used to substitute isn't for ain't.

It isn't fun to stay at home to listen for the telephone.
It isn't wrong to use your time trying hard to make a rhyme.

Motivation and Prosody

There are a number of ways to inspire children to write creatively. Some children require only time. If they are inspired to write, let them, no matter the time or place. Make it known that when the Muse whispers, they should stop, listen, and write. Too often posponement will jade or fade creativity. This little poem was one of those inspirations following a real experience on the playground. This fourth grade youngster has painted the picture well.

When we went on a picnic
With gloves, baseball, and bat
Mimi made a homer.
Now what do you think of that?
Dickie was on second,
When I was out on third.
And when the pitcher threw that ball,
It soared just like a bird.
When Hearns got up to bat,
He had to face the sun.
He missed the ball just by an inch,
The umpire yelled, "Strike one!"
When the old bell started ringing,
The score was four to one.
We had to go to school again.
The other team had won.

Diana

Probably the best way to inspire creativity is to read and reread familiar and favorite poems to them. After the poet's style becomes contageous, the students may want to try some originals. A very favorable form to start with is the Limerick. Read to them some Ogden Nash or Edward Lear fun poems which are enjoyed by people of all ages. This prosodical style is usually reserved for the junior high age, but can easily be adopted by younger children. Here are two samples by fourth and fifth graders:

There once was a man from Siam,
Who had an unusual lamb.

He ate it that night
With a terrible fright.
He found that it tasted like ham.

Mike, Grade four.

There was a young fellow who sat
Quite thoughtlessly down on his hat.
He stayed there a while
Which so changed its style,
That he uses it now for a mat.

Alex, Grade five.

Another type of poetry which young people of all ages enjoy writing is Japanese Haiku. To introduce it, set the stage, produce a receptive environment! This will include pictures, maps, costumes, and if possible, lights. Read a few genuine Japanese poems, follow with a brief discussion of the style: three lines of verse with a total of 17 syllables. There should be five syllables in the first and last lines; seven, in the second. You will be surprised at the excellent results! These samples were created and illustrated by two fifth grade boys:

Love is good and sweet.
Love is a very nice treat.
Loves means much to me.

Steve

How brightly it shines
The red and orange sunset,
When the sun goes down!

Chris

The American adaptation of Japanese Haiku may be introduced

as early as grade one or two. This form is, also called cinquain or a five line stanza. Its pattern is: line one, a noun; line two, two words to describe the noun; line three, three words to tell what it does; line four, four words to tell how it makes you feel; and line five, the noun or its synonym.

Two examples from a second grade class project follow:

Children
Big, little
Fight, play, swim.
Happy, sad, nice, helpful
Children.

Halloween,
Ghosts, goblins.
People give candy.
Happy, hungry, excited, funny.
Halloween.

Here are two written by fifth graders:

Cinquain,
Nice poetry.
Rhythm, not rhyme.
Poetry.

Scott

Cats,
Nice pretty
Jumps, plays, cuddles.
I'm allergic to cats.
Kittens.

Barbara

For younger children, the teacher could help the class prepare a list of animals, or things they love. Then with their help lists of descriptive, action, and feeling words. From these lists the children could develop their own compositions. This will eliminate the burden of spelling and encourage a more sophisticated vocabulary, as most children speak better than they write.

Another variation of Haiku is Tanka. It can not only be enjoyable to write but also serves as a subtle method of teaching syllabication to older children. It is far more fun than the usual word analysis method. This poetic form is a five line picture. Three lines of five syllables each, and two alternating lines of seven syllables each.

Early last November hundreds of trupeter swans rested for several days on the Ohio River at Beaver. It was a beautiful sight! This picture was captured in verse.

Swans, tired from flight,
Float majestically like kings.
When river steamers
Interrupted their parley,
In splendor took wing.

The decorations on the school Christmas trees inspired this one:

<u>December</u>
Trimming Christmas trees,
Children place with loving care
Their creative gifts.
Each star, or bell, or bobble
Symbolized their love.

So often it is very difficult to get the less inspired students to write creatively, especially if they have been turned off by lack of success in previous attempts. One teacher had her pupils recall old nursery rhymes. At first they were reluctant to recite such "baby stuff", but finally one girl rattled off one she had remembered and the ice was broken. Soon others began to recall verses. After getting them started, she suggested they take the beginning of a rhyme and give it an original ending. The results were interesting and enjoyable.

Hickery, Dickery, Dock
The mouse ran up the clock.
It stuck in the gears,
That stalled it for years,
Hickery, Dickery, Dock.

Jack be nimble,
Jack be quick,
Or else you'll sit
On the candle stick.

Apples are red;
Violets are blue.
If you slip on the ice,
You will be too.

The authors were disabled readers who found enjoyment in reading their own creations.

Another simple suggestion is to have each child select a picture he likes and make-up a coupled about it.

The timid, little, grayish mouse
Is peeking from his grassy house.

Dark green mountains with a quiet stream,
What a lovely place to stop and dream!

Joyce

Another method to encourage couplet writing and improve vocabulary at the same time is to have the students write alphcouplets. The first line should contain a noun, modified by three words beginning with the same initial consonant as the noun and the second line tells what the noun does.

The big, blue, beautiful blimp
Was pioneered by a charming chimp.

Hungry, heavy, hirsute Harry
In a bag, his wealth he carry.

Poetry may not rhyme but it must have rhythm. Underwater was written by one of our fifth graders and published in the American Red Cross Youth News.

Underneath water there are many things
Unknown
Undiscovered.
And all the unpredictable ways of this majestic world:
Different plants:
Unusual fish.
Mysterious crabs and mollusks
Roam this territory irresponsibly.
Walls of colorful coral and seaweed
Block gateways into a cave or passageway.
How I would like to live underwater
And see all these things!
A friend of sea monsters.
A companion of these beasts.

"The used to be...But now....poem" was used by one teacher[4] to give children a foundation to build creative poems. This selection reflects the sadness life can engender in today's youth.

I used to be a little boy playing army games,
But now I am a soldier in this war.
I used to have a little toy gun,
But now I have a rifle.
I used to see my friends fall over and play dead,
But now when I see my friend fall over, a tear comes to my eye.
I used to be unafraid of the fearless game,
But now I know that war isn't just a game.

David

Although this poem was written by an eighth grader, similar ones are possible at lower levels. Mr. De Santis had his pupils illustrate their poems with pictures of themselves at the first and eight grade levels.

In conclusion, let's not forget the therapeutic value of poetry. For this reason alone, memorizing and/or writing poems has merit. So often in adversity or in times of great joy, the words of a poet expresses our feelings far better than we, ourselves. The repetition of a familiar poem will give strength and encouragement. One friend, I know, must work with an individual that serves as a

daily crown of thorns. When things get too difficult, he resorts to making up fun jingles. While thinking of suitable descriptive words and rhymes, his frustrations are released and humor emerges. My one-a-day pill taken first thing before leaving the house every-day was written by Grace Noll Crowell.

"This day will bring some lovely thing,"
Some gay, adventurous, lovely thing.[5] (Arbuthnot p.208)

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